

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes of December 29, 2020

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), Trent Tucker (Highway Foreman), Jon Ignatowski (Economic Development Director), Carlos Pinkham, and Carolyn Stevens.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. In keeping with Governor Phil Scott's COVID-19 "stay at home" directive, the meeting was held remotely.

- II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled):** None.

III. BUDGET WORK SESSION

- a. FY 2021/2022 Town Budget Recap & Review.** Chair Maxwell first noted that the Budget & Financial Review Subcommittee (Select Board members Goodrich and Morse) met last week (12/22/20). He asked if they had anything to report. Board member Morse said he has sent out the meeting minutes by email. Since then, he has somewhat changed his opinion on whether the municipality should spend ±\$12,000 for the construction of a "tourist" or "promotional" website for Northfield. Board member Morse was contacted by Economic Development Director Jon Ignatowski who provided him links to the promotional websites for Middlebury and Waterbury. Board member Morse was quite impressed by them. In addition, Board member Morse has learned it might be possible to use about \$9,300 of COVID-19 reimbursement funds for local website development. He now sees this as a kind of investment in the future and likened it to when sections of Union Brook Road were first paved around 2003. Although there was a significant initial cost, this action resulted in the construction of several new homes in the area that caused an expansion of the Grand List, additional property tax revenues, etc. If the promotional website leads to local economic development with new or expanded businesses, the long-term effects will be similarly beneficial. Chair Maxwell thanked Board member Morse for the update and noted full discussion regarding the proposed new website is scheduled for a later time.

Chair Maxwell said this evening's meeting will focus on remaining issues in the FY 2021/2022 Town Highway budget. He said Board member Miller, who serves on the Highway Planning & Project Oversight Subcommittee, has prepared a proposal for funding replacement of the 2011 Chevy half-ton truck now used by the Town's Grounds/Equipment Operator. The vehicle was scheduled for replacement in a year or two but it recently failed state inspection and will need to be replaced as soon as possible. Board member Miller said his proposal is to shift some funds around in the Highway Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) proposed budget to fund this unanticipated purchase. He noted that one of the 2018 Dodge Rams scheduled for replacement in FY 2024/2025 has a \$75,971 balance in its CEP account. He would like to divert funds from this account, leaving \$33,000 and postponing replacement by one year. The FY 2021/2022 addition to this account would be increased from \$12,260 to \$18,340. This would make available \$36,563 towards the purchase of the new truck. The next step would be to add the remaining funds (\$32,000) in the 2009 International dump truck account after the new salt truck is purchased. Board member Miller also would like to increase the FY 2021/2022 addition to the Vehicle Lift Replacement account from \$5,500 to \$11,000 so that four (4) portable lifts can be purchased in the next fiscal year. The current vehicle lift has safety concerns and also should be replaced as soon as possible. Board member Miller also would like to increase the FY 2021/2022 addition to the Traffic Light account from \$10,000 to \$20,000. All these actions will result in \$55,000 savings in the Highway CEP budget and these funds can be used to purchase the new vehicle for the Grounds/Parks/Facilities department. As Highway Foreman Trent Tucker has recommended, this vehicle would be fitted with a plow and sander for winter road maintenance. A less expensive vehicle, perhaps used, could be purchased instead if that becomes the Select Board consensus. Chair Maxwell then thanked Board member Miller for his proposal and opened it up for discussion.

Manager Schulz agreed with Board member Miller that it was possible to fund the new vehicle by shifting funds around in the Highway CEP budget. However, he noted that since the creation of the reserve funds for replacing the Dodge Ram trucks was authorized by Northfield voters at the 2000 Town Meeting, any removal of current funds in these accounts also would require separate voter authorization. It probably would be more effective to transfer funds planned for the FY 2027/2028 replacement of the new salt truck (\$20,000) and add this to the \$32,000 leftover from the salt truck purchase. The resulting \$52,000 can be used to purchase the Grounds/Parks/Facilities new vehicle. Board member Miller noted this scheme would not provide the additional funds for the Traffic Light and Vehicle Lift accounts. It was noted the traffic signal at the intersection of North Main Street and Vine Street has had significant troubles in recent years. Manager Schulz said it has been kept going with periodic repairs but cannot be thus maintained indefinitely. Total replacement of the traffic light and control system would cost about \$50,000 and the current balance in this account is only \$11,220.

Chair Maxwell noted there have been many recent requests for a lighted pedestrian crossing sign at the intersection near the Falls General Store. He asked if there have been any funds dedicated for this purpose in the proposed budget. Manager Schulz said there were not. The purchase of the three (3) pedestrian signs at Depot Square and by Norwich University were funded out of the Highway Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) account for "Sign and Post." That account has a \$2,526 current balance with \$2,000 to be added in FY 2021/2022. Manager Schulz estimated the total cost for the new pedestrian sign at about \$7,000. Since this intersection is located on a state highway, Manager Schulz has had to contact the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) for permission. After a few conversations, Manager Schulz now believes VTrans will allow the sign to be installed but will not provide any funds. Chair Maxwell felt it might be a good idea to increase the Sign and Post budget to pay for the new pedestrian signage. Turning back to the Grounds/Parks/Facilities vehicle purchase, Manager Schulz suggested taking the \$12,260 that was going to be added to the Dodge Ram replacement fund in FY 2021/2022 and instead putting it towards the new vehicle purchase. This would provide sufficient funds (\$64,260) to fund the new vehicle as well as Board member Miller's suggested additions to the Traffic Light and Vehicle Lift accounts.

Chair Maxwell asked if Finance Director Laurie Baroffio could prepare updated budget sheets to reflect these suggested changes as well as other revisions previously accepted. Ms. Baroffio said an updated draft budget, including a separate summary of changes, would be prepared for the next scheduled budget meeting (01/05/21). Chair Maxwell would be grateful for this information. There was no further discussion of the highway budget. As for the proposal for the promotional website, this will be discussed fully at this next budget meeting (as had been previously agreed). Board member Miller believes the ±\$12,000 proposed cost could be reduced so he would like to explore this possibility then. Also scheduled for discussion that night are remaining issues in the Police Department budget.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled). There was none.

V. EXECUTIVE SESSION. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss a personnel matter with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 6:56 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 7:13 p.m. No action was taken.

VI. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 7:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes are subject to approval at the next regular Select Board meeting.